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Paul or Peter Chamberlen?

A NOTE ON THE CHAMBERLEN FAMILY.

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HAVING recently, through the kindness of a friend, been put in possession of an engraving of a portrait of one of the Chamberlens, I was led once again to look into the history of this remarkable family of obstetricians. Notwithstanding the admirable work of Dr. Aveling,¹ there are still several problems concerning the Chamberlens which have never been satisfactorily elucidated, and the engraving to which I refer, and which is here reproduced (*vide* plate²) is associated with one of them.

It is entitled "Paul Chamberlen, M.D. 1658: from an original drawing," and it carries the information that it was published May 30th, 1794, by W. Richardson, Castle Street, Leicester Square. It represents a man with well-marked features, and with flowing locks resting on his shoulders; the face is that of a man of at least middle age. When, however, one refers to the history of the Chamberlens, and especially of Dr. Paul Chamberlen, one finds it difficult to make the facts fit the portrait; for in 1658, the date of the picture, Paul Chamberlen was only twenty-three years of age, having been born in 1635, and the face in the picture is that of a man much older than twenty-three. At first I was not inclined to think much of this discrepancy, believing it to be due in all probability to an error in dating the engraving; but, wondering if Dr. Aveling had

1. Aveling (J. H.). "The Chamberlens and the Midwifery Forceps," 8vo, cloth, 231 pp. London, 1882.

2. The name R. White, which appears on the engraving was doubtless Robert White, a draughtsman and engraver who lived between 1645 and 1703. See *Dict. Nat. Biography*, vol. lxi, p. 73.

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noticed the want of agreement between the appearance of the face in the portrait and the age stated, I looked up his work (*op. cit.*, p. 30) and there found this interesting footnote: "This portrait is taken from a well-known engraving, beneath which is 'Paul Chamberlin, M.D., 1658.' It is really the likeness of Dr. Peter Chamberlen, for at this date Paul was only 23 years old, while the former was 57, which age corresponds precisely with the features represented above." According to Dr. Aveling, therefore, the portrait represents not Dr. Paul Chamberlen but his father Dr. Peter Chamberlen.

Dr. Paul Chamberlen was not a conspicuous member of the family, indeed, save for a certain notoriety in connexion with the recommendation of an "Anodyne Necklace" to be worn by children during dentition, he is almost unknown to fame. He had, however, a brother Hugh, known as "Hugh Chamberlen, Senior," who seems to have inherited the Chamberlen genius. At any rate, he was the author of various proposals for a New Establishment of Physic ("for the better securing of health"), for a Land Bank ("to make England Rich and Happy"), and for the Union of England and Scotland. Of all his schemes, however, the only one to be realized was the last named; but it is not known if he was alive at the time when the union was consummated, for soon after 1702 he went to live in Holland, and is heard of no more. It is upon a statement made by Dr. Hugh Chamberlen that the belief that the midwifery forceps was invented by his father, Dr. Peter Chamberlen, is founded. I must now refer to this Chamberlen (Dr. Peter), from whom Dr. Hugh inherited not only the forceps but also that genius for making proposals for the health and happiness of the country to which I have already alluded.

Dr. Peter Chamberlen, who is, according to Dr. Aveling, represented in the accompanying portrait, was the third of the name of whom we have any information. William Chamberlen fled to England from Paris in 1569, for he and his wife were Huguenots. They had several children, including *two* named Peter; they have been named Peter Chamberlen the Elder and Peter Chamberlen the Younger. Dr. Peter Chamberlen the Younger, who, in association with his brother, attempted to carry out a scheme for the Incorporation of Midwives (an attempt, made nearly three hundred years ago, to do in some measure what the Midwives Act of 1902 is now doing), had a large family, the eldest child being Dr. Peter Chamberlen, third of the name. This member of the Chamberlen family, therefore, was grandson of William, nephew of Peter the Elder, and son of Peter the Younger. He was born in London in 1601, and died at Woodham Mortimer Hall, near Maldon in Essex in 1683, at the advanced age of 82. If the accompanying engraving indeed represents Dr. Peter Chamberlen, and if the date (1658) attached thereto be that of the year in which the portrait was painted, then it must

have been executed when the Doctor was 57 years of age, "which age," as Aveling says, "corresponds precisely with the features represented."

There can be no doubt that this Peter Chamberlen was the most distinguished member of the family. He received the degree of Doctor of Medicine at the University of Padua at the age of eighteen; soon after his return to London he was admitted to the Fellowship of the College of Physicians; he became physician extraordinary to the King (Charles I), to whom the Czar of Russia wrote begging him to allow the doctor to come to Moscow and enter his service; he brought forward once more the scheme for the Incorporation of Midwives which his father had mooted but with no better success; he advocated the use of "Baths and Bath-stoves" for the cure of diseases and the preservation of health; he had ideas on phonetic writing embodied in a project for "a new art or way of writing and printing true English, whereby better to represent to the eye what the sound doth to the ear"; and he had a project for the reconciliation of the churches whereby he hoped that a union of the Jewish religion with all the Christian sects into one single church would be effected. Perhaps the most interesting of all his schemes to us who live in the days of motor cars and automobiles was his proposal for propelling carriages and ships by wind, "to make Coaches, Waggon, Carts, Ploughs, etc., to go by Engine without Horses," and "to be able to navigate with all Winds in a Straight Line." I imagine that if Dr. Chamberlen could now revisit Ludgate Hill and take note of the traffic he would think that his dream of the horseless carriages had been fulfilled. That Dr. Chamberlen also invented the midwifery forceps was long believed, but Dr. Aveling's researches seem to show that he only inherited the instrument from his father (Peter Chamberlen the Younger) or, more probably, from his uncle (Peter Chamberlen the Elder). But even if this honour be taken from him and given to another member of the family, Dr. Peter remains a most interesting personality.

Since Dr. Aveling wrote his book on *The Chamberlens*, some further investigation of the family's history, and more especially of the life and travels of Dr. Peter Chamberlen, has been undertaken. Dr. Scharffenberg,¹ knowing that Dr. Peter had dealings with the Swedish and Danish Governments in regard to his wind-impelled carriages and other inventions, has investigated the archives of these countries, and has found that the English obstetrician obtained a patent from the former government in 1669, and from the latter in 1670. It is probable that he personally visited Sweden and Denmark. Dr. Scharffenberg has found that a Thomas Chamberlen died in Denmark in 1671, and he regards this Chamberlen as probably a son

1. Scharffenberg. *Norsk Mag. f. Laegevidenskaben*, 1902, vol. lxxiii, p. 419.

of Dr. Peter. In Holland also there are traces of the Chamberlen family, and possibly the Dutch archives may contain interesting information regarding the subject of this short note. Dr. Scharffenberg believes that he suffered from mania, and he comes to the conclusion that the specific type was *paranoia inventoria et religiosa* founding his opinion on the fact that he ventured to conceive the possibility of a union between the various Christian churches and the Jewish, a somewhat insufficient reason in itself.

